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Therapeutic Horticulture and Agriculture in educational spaces

Tracy Ann Hayes & Mark Christie, University of Cumbria

Therapeutic Horticulture and Agriculture

- Funded by National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
- 3 locations:
 - Therapeutic Agriculture (TA) – working farm in NC as alternative provision for young people.
 - Therapeutic Horticulture (TH) - 2 gardens in specialist secondary schools in NE –and wide range of complex needs, including learning difficulties and autism spectrum conditions, with Education, Health and Care Plans and/or additional, specific pastoral support.
- Exploring how TH and TA might offer better care for young people, identified as being at risk of educational failure and later negative outcomes.

The Research Team

- Mark & Tracy are co-researchers, University of Cumbria (UoC)
- Karen is office-based research assistant, also experienced Occupational Therapist
- Sam is volunteer, providing external review support, doctoral researcher, psychology
- Practitioners – teachers, teaching assistants, farmers, students on placements
- Young People – and their parents / carers
- The animals – and plants
- All are part of this study



What does literature tell us?

There is a lot of literature related to this project, including:

- Farming/agriculture,
- Gardening/horticulture,
- Young people/educators/farmers,
- Nature/environment,
- Care/green care/caring
- Therapeutic/therapy

Terms are often used in an interchangeable way – which can be problematic.

In our project settings, there are no ‘therapists’, there are educators, farmers, gardeners and volunteers from the community.

Care Farms provide...

... health, social and educational care services on working farms or purpose-built farms through farming-related activities.

Three key elements for care farming include (O'Neill, 2020):

- Purposeful work,
- Social interaction and
- Being outdoors.

These elements can be applied in school garden settings

This report provides a useful overview, and includes a glossary

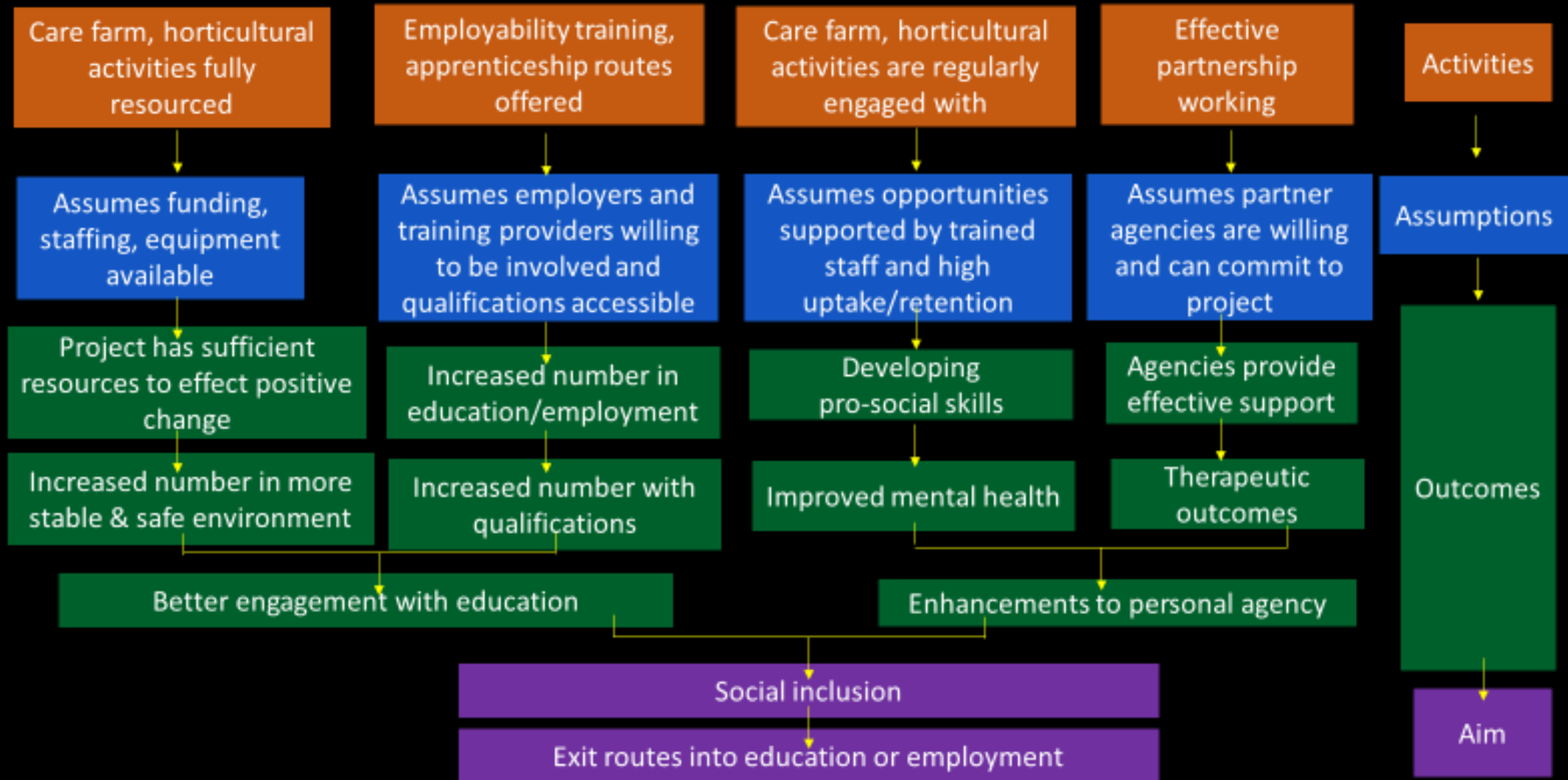
<https://media.churchillfellowship.org/documents/ONeill J Report 2020 Final.pdf>

Where we're at...

- Delayed start due to Covid-19
- Used this time for autoethnographies from researchers Mark, Tracy, Karen and Sam, useful for:
 - team building
 - Identifying and managing potential bias
- Have Theory of Change for overall project, developing individual ones for each organisation, to pilot and refine
- Initial field work completed, now in midst of analysis

Theory of Change – research study

Therapeutic horticulture & agriculture: Logic Model Example



What we've found so far

Resilience

Young people need to learn how to fail and then move on...

Learning activities are **grounded, practical & purposeful**

Protective / challenging

Discourage over-protection and enable calculated risk

Healing

opportunities for ***being* outdoors** – calming, caring / stimulating

Encouraging **independence** and **teamwork**

Appreciative / social
thank you for food,
thank you for farming,
thank you for friends

Where and what next...

1. Taking our preliminary findings back to the settings:
 - More fieldwork to check preliminary findings – participant observations – working alongside
 - Focus groups and interviews – creative methods
 - New year – new participants
2. Meetings with project team and stakeholders
3. Continuing analysis and writing – to disseminate next year.

Panel Discussion

- How may we apply our findings to other outdoor spaces?
- How can this extend to mainstream education?
- How may this offer a way of responding to Covid-19?

Follow on

Nature, Outdoor Learning & Play special interest group: @BERA_Nolap

Web: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/community/nature-outdoor-learning-and-play>

Tracy: @hayes_tracy tracy.hayes@cumbria.ac.uk

Mark: @MarkChristie59 mark.christie@cumbria.ac.uk